

product
preview



Studer Vista 9

PAUL MAC visits
Soundcraft Studer HQ for a demo
on the shiny new Vista 9 –
the sum of the best that the
Vista series has to offer.

THE STUDER VISTA SERIES of consoles has been a runaway success in all sorts of interesting places – from large concert halls to TV production and post production environments, and onto live touring applications. The combination of utterly flexible routing, a myriad of interfacing and routing options, and a surface that stands out from the crowd with simplicity, adaptability, and Vistonics.

The latest Vista console is quite special. It marks a jump forward, rather than a re-jig. Indeed, Studer has confirmed that the Vista 9 is the new top-end flagship console. Though the 8 will be available to customers for as long as there is still demand, the 9 represents an accumulation of features, lessons learned, and new hardware that makes it the new top dog in the Vista line.

On Location

I visited the Soundcraft Studer HQ in Potters Bar, UK, where a large proportion of the Studer operation has been relocated (though R&D and Customer Support remain in Switzerland at the Console Technology centre), and got the Vista 9 demo from Peter Weber, Product Manager for the Vista series. First, the main stories:

PW: “The headliners are really the TFT screen, the fader glow, the standard redundancy features we’ve built in, the integrated monitoring, and the new ergonomic layout – the fact that you can now operate everything from everywhere.

That would be about it. From outside, it looks simple, but on the inside we have started to use new, just recently available technology. Inside, it’s a huge step in terms of both hardware and software technology platforms.

“This will build the base for the future. Such a console is a big investment, and when the customer buys one of these and puts it in his truck or studio, he should really be able to do any kind of production, years after he bought the console. It’s adaptable, it’s expandable, it can be controlled from other systems – and we constantly bring new features and new software, which is free of charge.”

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So, where do we start? The Vista 9 has the same modular DSP engine and IO concept as the other Vista series consoles do. This means you can populate your

DSP rack with as much or as little power as you need, and configure the console’s I/O, routing, processing, and outputs exactly as you need them, within the confines of the DSP available. The system is compatible with the

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PAUL MAC is Editor of *Audio Media* magazine.



► inter-studio control and audio resource linking system, RELINK, as well as the Studer Route and D21m audio interface system.

The D21 I/O options are big, and get bigger on a regular basis. The current count is 17, including mic ins, line I/O, AES I/O, MADI, ADAT, TDIF, SDI, Dolby E, CobraNet, Aviom, Ethersound, and GPIO.

But let's get onto the innovations in the Vista 9...

PW: "The most obvious change is that we have TFT media screens, which allow us to display all sorts of data in some quite new and innovative ways... For example, the metering. For all possible channel types, we have the metering to go with it – from mono to stereo to 5.1 to 7.1, always in the same slot or space.

"The priority is to have as large a bar graph meter as possible. This is a precision instrument, so you need to see the art.

"In order to bring in more information we have defined a lower area to be configurable – three-fold on a surround input or master. It can bring you the surround image, and we also have what we call a history diagram of incoming or outgoing signals. This shows you the history of your signal and defines or finds events like overloads or signal loss.

"When you are focusing on some important channels, you might miss what's going on

somewhere else. You might hear something strange. With the history feature you can have a look and you can see what has happened.

"The third current option in this lower portion of the TFTs is a buss assignment screen.

"Also, the control bay metering is a bit special, because it's mainly made to show output channels.

"We can have different meter views for this screen. I can switch to a predefined meter view to see all auxiliary outputs. Or I can see all groups, or all programme masters, direct outs, buss outputs, N-1s, matrix channels, and so on... And then I have user pages where I can assign whatever I want, via the strip set-up again. There are four user page templates with 10, 20, 30, and 40 slots. So if I go to page four, I've got 40 meters and they can be anything."

On The Slope

► If you're looking for a next most obvious difference feature, then it's probably the rake of the Vistronics and control section of the console. It's steeper than in previous models, making a very sensible assumption about the length of operators' arms. Whatever the reason, consoles have gone through a period of low rake angles and arm stretches that have forced fader caps to regularly excavate navel fluff. No more. Peter makes the point that this kind of ergonomic change will enhance both actual and perceived control, which has got to be a good thing.

Other obvious enhancements include the introduction of FaderGlow to the Studer line. Previously used on Soundcraft's live console, this system gives the user eight different colour codes for a thin strip of light along the length of the fader path and on the Link/Select button. Per default all FaderGlow stripes are dark, but you can also define your own colours for specific channels or groups of channels.

Now, onto the surface itself, and another step forward with monitoring:

PW: "With the Vista 9, we have integrated all control room monitoring facilities into the desk, so this means your control room speakers are directly connected to the desk. You don't need an additional IO rack just for the monitoring, that's in the desk as standard.

"I have my sources, which can be labelled – control room, two studios; and I have volume control, two possible groups of surround speakers in the control room, two x 7.1 outputs, and one nearfield in stereo. And then I have two optional studio outputs in stereo, and have completely integrated talkback facilities where I can talk to all internal channels, the studios, and to external targets.

"It's fairly simple to set up and you can assign those buttons to be anything – any source that is available within the system.





▶ *"Also in the monitoring section, when you're listening to surround and switch to stereo, it does an automatic downmix, though there are parameters that define how the downmix should be done. Depending on the material you might want to have the downmix set differently. Then you can copy the same settings onto your master outputs and have a stereo and mono generated automatically from your surround mix as well.*

"You can decide how much of the rear channels should be in the downmix, you can trim how much of the centre should be in it, and then there are three different types of algorithms. There's the ITU, and then the LtRt – doing it in a sort of Dolby way – and then there's a third one that uses a Lexicon proprietary algorithm with even more parameters to change. But that's also available on the Vista 5 and Vista 8, so it has been available before."

To Me, To You

Following the doctrine of flexibility and user choice, Studer has taken on board some comments and made the two types of fader bays more adaptable.

PW: *"We now have channel processing buttons and gain control in every channel strip on the control bay. These are controls used for input channels, but people wanted to use the control bay more flexibly and also put input channel there.*

"Now with a select button you can get to all parameters of every input channel through the control strips on the control bay.

"It makes it more flexible, because the control bay originally was designed to be used for output channels, mix masters, and so on. Now you can access everything from the input parameters in a control bay strip, not only on the fader bays.

"And it works the other way around. I can place master channels on input strips and I also have the contribution button, which shows all contributing inputs. For multi-operator sessions, if an operator is assigned to two normal fader panels he can also operate output channels, and vice versa."

The Vista 9 has even more advances up its sleeve. Studer is using a new design of quiet motorised fader. The actual motion is quiet, yes, but that mini rattle when faders start and stop has been eliminated. At least in part, this seems down to marginally 'soft-knee' acceleration and braking,

as opposed to the brickwall that others hit.

As mentioned above, redundancy is also now a standard fitting, not an option. This is the first time that the Vista series has had redundant power supplies and control computers as standard. Of course, there's also redundant Ethernet links to the DSP rack, which with the MADI link for the monitoring system makes three Cat-5s necessary for hook-up.

Conclusion

It's interesting that Studer introduces the Vista 9 as a 'Live Performance Console'. Yes, it's going to find a natural home in broadcast facilities, trucks, permanent big-stage installations, and so on, but don't rule out any other uses – recording and post, for example. The automation is certainly up to the task, and the flexible approach to routing and configuration means that the Vista 9 can be pretty much anything you want it to be. The only application Studer deems as unsuitable on website tick-boxes is touring – presumably

because it's not designed to be kicked around by roadies.

Studer has learned from its users, evolved its technology, and made good use of the Soundcraft development team. In the beginning, Vistonics was the primary key to loving Vista – maybe because the novelty overshadowed the detail. Now it's that, and everything else as well. **AM**

INFORMATION

📍 GBE – TBA

📞 Studer (Harman)

🌐 www.studer.ch

📍 Soundcraft Studer UK, Cranborne House,
Cranborne Road, Potters Bar, Herts, EN6 3JN

☎ +44 (0) 1707 665000